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SUBJECT: TFLE01: MFA VIEWS ON LEBANON, GAZA AND THE ARAB
LEAGUE MEETING

Classified By: Charge Wayne J. Bush, reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On July 17, Charge met with Ambassador Mohamed Azeroual, Director General of Multilateral Relations and Global Cooperation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to discuss the Arab League meeting held in Cairo over the weekend and recent events in Lebanon. Azeroual views the conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon as both linked to lack of progress in the peace process. He encouraged the USG to work with Egypt, Morocco and Israel to reinvigorate the peace process, to strengthen Lebanon, and to support Abu Mazen. He admitted to little dialogue with Syria or Iran, especially on the subject of those countries' support for Hizballah. While media commentary in Morocco runs strongly against Israel, the GOM sees clearly the threat posed by Hizballah and Hamas, as well as by radical Islamists in Morocco. Conscious of its Jewish minority and historic dialogue with Israel, the GOM is well positioned to play a constructive role in the Middle East. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Charge met July 17 with Ambassador Mohamed Azeroual, MFA Director General of Multilateral Relations and Global Cooperation. Poloff and Hassan Hami, Chief of the Division of Arab and Islamic Organizations, attended the meeting. The Charge asked for Moroccan perspectives on the weekend Arab League (AL) meeting in Cairo. According to Azeroual, Israel's current conflicts in Gaza and with Lebanon are both the result of lack of progress in the peace process. Azeroual described Hizballah as a central impediment to peace and security in Lebanon and the region. The Government of Lebanon (GOL) needs the financial and military means to rid Lebanon of Hizballah, Azeroual said. The U.S., according to Azeroual, should participate actively in providing the resources. While the GOL under Sinoria is working to reconstruct Lebanon, its army is not as strong as Hizballah's, Azeroual observed. He believed Hizballah's strength has grown in the aftermath of the Lebanese civil war with continued Syrian support. The only path to peace is eliminating Hizballah's strength, Azeroual said.

¶3. (C) Azeroual nevertheless criticized the scope of Israel's attacks on Lebanon, and described Moroccan difficulty in assisting hundreds of Moroccan nationals trapped in Lebanon to evacuate. The Charge expressed concern for Moroccan citizens in Lebanon, adding that the State Department is currently working to evacuate thousands of U.S. citizens from Lebanon. He underlined that the violence has been triggered by the Hizballah kidnapping of an Israeli soldier, and that Hizballah continues to launch rockets into

Israel. It is vital for countries like Syria to take steps to restrain Hizballah, he said. In response to Charge's question about the extent of Moroccan dialogue with Syria, Azeroual said that contact is limited and "not on a political level." He similarly insisted that FM Benaissa's recent travel to Tehran had focused on the nuclear issue, and that Morocco has not discussed support for Hizballah with the Iranians.

¶4. (C) Turning to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Azeroual recalled that during A/S Welch's last visit to Morocco, he had urged the U.S. to help strengthen Abu Mazen. However, the peace process had stalled, and the current violence was the result. The Charge noted that Hamas is preventing progress on peace by refusing to embrace the principles outlined by the Quartet and international community, including renunciation of violence, respecting prior Palestinian commitments, and recognizing Israel's right to exist. Azeroual acknowledged this but strongly encouraged continued U.S. support for Abu Mazen and continuing dialogue with regional actors.

¶5. (C) Comment: This discussion illustrates the Moroccan government's careful positioning regarding events in the Middle East. The Moroccan leadership recognizes the serious threat posed by Hizballah and Hamas, and by extension its own Islamist groups - the radical Justice and Charity Organization and the Party for Justice and Development, which is more moderate but has nevertheless reached out to Hamas. While media commentary in Morocco concerning the current conflicts is overwhelmingly anti-Israel, the GOM is conscious of its history of dialogue with Israel and its valued Jewish minority, brought to the fore by the fact that Israel's current defense minister is Moroccan. Although informal GOM

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reaction to the Saudi statement holding Hizballah responsible for violence was positive, Morocco rarely breaks with Arab League consensus. Nevertheless, if requested by and with encouragement from the U.S., the Moroccan leadership is well positioned and intellectually disposed to play a constructive role in the Middle East.

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